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SIPDIS

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/WATERS

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SUBJECT: NABIL AMR AND AZZAM AL-AHMAD ON SELECTION OF NEW CABINET

Amr: Cabinet Consultations in Progress

¶1. (SBU) Nabil Amr told the ConGen POL specialist on June 15 that President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and his close advisors are nearing consensus on names for cabinet ministers under PM Salam Fayyad and will meet at 1800 local June 15 at the Muqata' in Ramallah to finish consultations. He said they are still debating whether all ministers should be independents or whether some can be Fatah. Amr said Abbas and Fayyad need rapid U.S. assurances that the restrictions, which were imposed after Hamas won the January 2006 parliamentary elections, will be lifted immediately after the new government is formed. He said this USG step will go a long way to ensure public support and counter Hamas attacks on the new government's legitimacy and prospects for success.

Amr said he had proposed Abd al-Razaq al-Yihya for Interior Minister (MoI). (Note: Al-Yihya was MoI under Yasser Arafat in the mid-1990s. He is respected for his long service, but he is also elderly, infirm and not considered a dynamic leader. End Note.).

Al-Ahmad: Cabinet of Independents Best

¶2. (SBU) Fatah PLC Bloc leader (and Deputy PM in the now-defunct NUG) Azzam al-Ahmad evinced strong disappointment at not being named PM, but told the ConGen POL specialist June 15 that the new Cabinet should consist entirely of independents, to ensure it is perceived as a legitimate emergency government and to blunt Hamas accusations that it is an illegitimate collection of Fatah opportunists. Al-Ahmad said he will attend the June 15 Arab League meeting and that Jordanian representatives had assured him of unreserved Jordanian support for Abu Mazen. He said the new Cabinet must take credit for restrictions being lifted within 30 days of its formation and before the initial 30-day emergency decree period lapses to boost the Cabinet legitimacy and ensure its mandate is renewed.

WALLES